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## Proverb Use in Insecurity and Conflict Resolution in Igbo

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### Abstract

*Proverb is a concept of deep thought, an insightful traditional saying that expresses a perceived truth based on common sense or experience which could be metaphorical and use formulaic language. This paper focuses on proverb use in insecurity and conflict resolution in Igbo. In other words, it aims at selecting the Igbo proverbs that relate to insecurity and also those ones which could be used to resolve conflict. The study uses elicitation as the primary source of data, while the secondary source is book compilations of proverbs. This paper adopts Searle's (1975) speech act theory whose illocutionary classifications include; assertives, commissives, expressive, declarations and directives for its analysis. Observation was made that certain Igbo proverbs are primarily used as signals towards insecurity; example, 'mkpume rigoro elu, egwu atụwa ite mmiri' which is used to predict the state of insecurity at an aforeplanned action. Furthermore, 'Agwọ nọ n'akịrịka', is a general proverb used for insecurity or danger. On the other hand, proverbs for conflict resolution include; 'Nwa mmadụ emegbule nwa mmụọ, ma nwa mmụọ emegbule nwa mmadụ' which is a call for fair justice among all, 'mmadụ anaghị ekwo otu ọkọ siri kọọ ya kọhịa ahụ' which is a proverb that encourages tolerance. Conclusively, it could be said that Igbo proverbs play a vital role in security alert and conflict resolution.*

**Keywords:** proverb, insecurity, conflict resolution, speech act

## **1. Introduction**

It is noteworthy that the wisdom and spirit of the people are manifested in its proverbs and sayings. More so, acquiring proverbs and sayings of one's own nation or other nations, not only contributes to a better knowledge of the language, but also promotes a better understanding of the way of thinking and the nature of the people that speak it. Proverbs and sayings are pearls of folk wisdom. In fact, as people interpret artistically various aspects of life, social experience, their outlook is revealed, the originality of artistic attitudes and tastes, mental and ethical and aesthetic values, and social ideals cultivate new generations from century to century. The main purpose of proverbs is to give people's assessment of the objective reality of phenomena as an expression of the world. In proverbs and sayings are expressed the peculiar store or mindset of the peoples' intelligence; way of judgment; view of features; indication of the way of life and everyday life; the spirit and character of the people; their manners and customs, and beliefs and superstitions. Hence, proverbs and sayings most clearly illustrate lifestyle, and geography, and history, and traditions of a community united by a single culture. Insecurity on the other hand, is a state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection. As conflict points towards opposition, conflict resolution is the reduction, elimination, or termination of all forms and types of conflict. Hence, this research gears towards the use of proverbs in insecurity and conflict resolution in Igbo.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Proverbs**

A proverb (from Latin: *proverbium*) is a simple and insightful, traditional saying that expresses a perceived truth based on common

sense or experience. Proverbs are based on symbolic or metaphorical language. Metaphors used as an aspect of a teaching method could be effective because they could enhance the conceptualisation of abstract ideas. Metaphors reveal only part of the answers and learners could be actively involved in completing and understanding the meaning of metaphors. Proverbs encourage curiosity about their meanings. They also exert pressure or, at the least, suggest that ideas should be related to prior knowledge and experience (Entwistle, 2000). Proverbs communicate in a symbolic way, which is not direct or literal. Proverbs conceal and reveal information and often leave one with a question that one has to answer oneself. Proverbs function metaphorically in the same way that visual communication design does.

In African languages, proverbs are used consciously to educate and to manipulate and persuade. McKenna (1974) describes proverbs as a way in which society warns its members of the dangers of life. According to Daniel, Smitherman-Donaldson and Jeremiah (1987), proverbs are central to abstract thinking and reasoning. According to Boateng (1983:332), a proverb conveys a message in a way in which a child also learns to reflect on the possible meanings of the proverb. It is an indirect way of teaching through which a child does not feel bombarded by rules. Boateng (1983:332) further remarks that ancestors play an important role in giving the proverb strength, in that a phrase such as “It is the ancestors that said...” is sometimes used before a proverb. Boateng (1983:331) points that proverbs are “validators of traditional procedures and beliefs” and warns that the rejection of black African heritage will leave the black African with a feeling of lost identity.

## **2.2 Insecurity**

The word ‘insecurity’ has myriads of connotations which signify danger; hazard; uncertainty; lack of protection, and lack of safety.

Beland (2005) in Ndubuisi-Okolo and Anigbuogu (2019) observes that insecurity is the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection. It refers to lack or inadequate freedom from danger. This implies that insecurity is an absence of peace, order and security. Achumba, Ighomeroho and Akpor (2013) also define insecurity from two perspectives. Firstly, insecurity is the state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury. Secondly, insecurity is the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune. These definitions of insecurity underscore a major point that those affected by insecurity are not only uncertain or unaware of what would happen but they are also vulnerable to the threats and dangers when they occur.

### **2.3 Conflict Resolution**

Robbins (2005) defines conflict as a process that begins where one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to affect negatively something that the first party cares about. This is an accurate definition emphasising that conflict is about perception not necessarily real hard facts. It further points to the emotional nature of conflict, by referring to a word like care. It states that more than one party is involved and that there may be future component attached to it. Furthermore, Thakore (2013) opines that conflict means to be in opposition to one another. It refers to disagreement between people or members of organisations. Such disagreement is inherent in relationships between all human beings. Robbins (1991) in Osabiya (2015) highlights types of conflicts. They include:

- i. Hierarchical Conflict: There may be conflict between the various levels of the organization. The board of director may be in conflict with top management, middle management may be in conflict with

supervisory personnel, or there may be general conflict between management and workers.

ii. Functional Conflict: There may be conflict between the various functional departments of the organization; conflict between the production and marketing department in an industrial organization is a classic example.

iii. Line- Staff Conflict: There may be conflict between line and staff. It often results from situations in which staff personnel do not formerly possess authority over line personnel.

iv. Formal- Informal Conflict: There may be conflict between the formal and informal organizations for example; the informal organization norms for performance may be incompatible with the formal organization norms for performance. Conflict can be viewed into five sequential stages which are; latent, perceived, felt, and manifest and conflict resolution stages.

v. Latent: In this stage the basic conditions for potential conflict are resources, role conflict, drivers for autonomy, divergence of individual goal, etc. These conditions are lower suppressed for reasons not quite known to members or belong to the opposition on every issue.

vi. Perceived: At this stage, focused anxieties are created between the anxiety and tension. Each party begins to develop negative feelings towards each other. As the parties in conflict argue and battle for their points of view, the significance of the disputed issue is likely to be blown out of proportion.

vii. Manifest: This is the stage of open conflict, a stage when conflict behaviour is exhibited; such overt behaviour includes sabotage.

viii. Resolution and Aftermath: This stage represent the condition that exists after the resolution or suppression of the conflict if the conflicts have been genuinely resolved, it can lead to an improved relationship and effective cooperation between organizational

members. But if not resolved adequately, it may lead to a new and more severe conflict than the first.

In a similar vein, Osabiya (2015) states that conflict could be intrapersonal or interpersonal, inter-group or inter organizational. Intrapersonal are conflict that are internal to individual i.e. mutually exclusive positive goal conflict, positive negative goal conflict and negative- conflict. Interpersonal are conflict between two or more people in the organization. Intergroup are conflict between groups in the same organization. Inter-organizational conflicts are conflict between organizations.

Osabiya (2015), states that conflict resolution involves the reduction, elimination, or termination of all forms and types of conflict. He further states that when people talk about conflict resolution they tend to use terms like negotiation, bargaining, mediation, or arbitration.

#### **2.4 Speech Acts Theories**

Speech act is when people perform various actions through the use of words and when utterances are made, a particular act is performed. The Speech Acts theory is also described as “How to Do Things with Words Theory” since it has its roots in the work of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). They are able to provide a shift from constative notion to performative notion in the empirical verifiability of signs; that is, the truthfulness of signs to what an expression does when it is uttered. Speech acts according to Austin (1962) fall into three classes, which are: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act is an act of saying something; that is, the act of producing an utterance. Illocutionary acts are the core of any theory of speech acts. The perlocutionary act is the effect or influence on the feelings, thoughts or actions of the listener/hearer unlike locutionary acts. Perlocutionary acts could be

inspiring, persuading, consoling, promising, encouraging etc. It brings about an effect upon the beliefs, attitudes or behaviours of the addressee. It is in consonance with this that Levinson (1981) describes perlocutionary act as the intended or unintended consequences of the speaker's utterance. Searle (1969) improves on Austin's (1962) Speech Act theory by distinguishing between two types of speech acts: Direct and Indirect Speech Acts. Searle (1969) categorizes the illocutionary act into five classes:

- i. Assertives: These are statements that describe a state of affairs in the world which could be true or false. They commit a speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition.
- ii. Directives: These are statements that compel or make another person's action fit the propositional element. It is usually used to give order thereby causing the hearer to take a particular action, request, command or advice.
- iii. Commissive: These statements commit the speaker to certain future action. It could be in the form of a promise.
- iv. Expressives: The purpose of expressive statements is to express sincerity of the speech act like excuses and sympathy.
- v. Declaratives: These statements are used to say something and make it so, such as pronouncing someone guilty and declaring a war.

### **3. Data Presentation and Analysis**

In this section, we present the proverbs used in insecurity and also conflict resolution.

#### **3.1 Proverbs Used in Insecurity**

Several Igbo proverbs are suggestive of security alertness to the people around.

- 1) Nkwùcha abughị ụjọ (alertness is not fear)
- 2) A naghị agwa ochi ntị na agha esula (a stubborn person is not notified of war)

- 3) O ji ọsọ agbakwu ọgu, amaghị na ọgu bụ ọnwụ (he who runs towards fight, is not aware that fight is death)
- 4) Onye ọ na-eme omume omume, na-ebe obube obube (he who is regularly oppressed, cries always)
- 5) Agwọ nọ n'akirika (there is a snake in the grass)
- 6) Ọkọkọ na-akpa nri sị ụmụ ya, anya uhie akọla ha (a hen in search of food instructs the chicks not to be careless)
- 7) Ọsọ ndụ agwụ ike (life race is not tiring)
- 8) Ọsọ chụwa mmadụ, ọ gbalaga ikwu nne ya (when one is being pursued, he will run to his maternal house)
- 9) Mkpume rịgoro elu, egwu atụwa ite mmiri (when a stone gets up, water pot gets frightened)
- 10) Ebe nwata na-ebe akwa arụ aka, nne ya anọghị ya nna ya anọọ ya (where a child is pointing at while crying, it's either the mother or the father is there)

From the above examples (1-10), the proverbs are suggestive of insecurity, of which the effect is meant to keep the individual at security consciousness or alert. Sometimes, it could be for a quick action to be taken or just an illustration of the after effect of a happening. The most prevalent illocutionary acts in the proverbs in insecurity are assertives, commissives and directives.

As perlocutionary acts are described to be inspiring, persuading, consoling, promising, encouraging etc. which brings about an effect upon the beliefs, attitudes or behaviours of the addressee. Hence, example (7) depicts encouragement as the perlocutionary act. In insecurity, Igbo proverbs do perlocutionary acts of behavioural change of the listeners, either positively or negatively. It creates awareness to the native speakers of the language who get the meaning of the proverbs and act accordingly, but negatively to the ones who do not have the knowledge of the proverbs.

### **3.2 Proverbs used in Conflict Resolution**

There are several proverbs in Igbo which are used in conflict resolution. They include:

11) E gbuwe na a toro, mmadu agaghị afọ (if killing is based on seniority, nobody will remain). There is no equality on earth. There is seniority based on age, rank, etc. In the family setting, the same is applicable; whereby bullying is not allowed irrespective of the superiority. This is obtainable because when one bullies another due to seniority, he/she would be bullied by a senior. At that, no one will be left safe.

12) Oko kowa mmadu, o gakwuru mmadu ibe ya, ma o kowa anu ohia, ya aga n'ukwu osisi. (a human goes to a fellow human when wants to scratch, whereas animals go the tree). When there is conflict, individuals involved do not help one another, yet it is needful that one should help each other in life. This proverb is an expressive one.

13) Nwa mmadu emegbule nwa mmuo, ma nwa mmuo emegbule nwa mmadu (human should not maltreat spirit and spirit should not maltreat human). No one is permitted to maltreat or bully another as a result of superiority or otherwise. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is directives.

14) Onye mutara nwa guo ya Akumefule, o si kwanu nke onye fuo? (he who gives birth and named him my wealth should not lost, is asking whose own to lost). As everyone on earth wishes him/herself well, it will be an aberration for such individual to wish others crisis. During conflict, each opponent wishes the other evil and as well rejoices when the evil befalls the opponent. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is directives.

15) Iwe nwanne anaghị eru n'okpukpu (brothers anger does not get to the bone). In settling conflict, it is noteworthy to remind the

individuals involved that brotherhood has strong bond. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is assertives.

16) *Ikwu na-amaghị, ibe ezi ya.* (when kinsman does not know, the relatives will teach him). One can be at fault, but at the cause of conflict resolution, the proverb would be a pointer towards correction and bringing right perspective to the individuals involved. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is assertives.

17) *Onye na-atabeghị onugbu anaghị ama ka ihe na-adị.* (he who has not chewed bitter leaf, does not know how things are). Experience is the best teacher. People take things for granted when they have not experienced the impact or effects of certain actions or situations. This proverb enlightens those in conflict to turn away from it. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is assertives.

18) *Oji onye iro n'ala jikwa onwe ya.* (he who holds the enemy on the ground, is also holding himself). This proverb plays a vital role in conflict resolution by educating the individuals involved that one's progress is on halt as he keeps the progress of others on halt. Nobody progresses by blocking the progress of others. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is assertives.

19) *Onye iberiibe amaghị na nwanne ya bụ ọbịa* (a fool does not know that his sibling is a visitor). Igbo people entertain visitors in a pleasing manner. As such, when people in conflict perceive themselves as visitors, the conflict can easily be resolved. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is assertives.

20) *Mmadu anaghị ekwo otu ọkọ siri kọọ ya kọhịa ahụ.* (one should not as a result of the intensity of scratch, injure oneself). Actions ought not to be taken with the gravity of offence, if peace should be retained in the system. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is assertives.

21) *Otu mkpịsị aka rụta mmanụ, ya ezuo ọha.* (when one finger gets oil, it touches others). The impact of a simple conflict can spread

abroad, affecting even innocent individuals. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is commissives.

22) Egbe bere ugo bere, nke si ibe ya eberela, nku kwapu ya. (eagle and hawk should perch, and anyone resists another from perching, should suffer wing break). Selfishness is a cankerworm that destroys peace. This proverb is used in counseling those in conflict on the impact of selfishness. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is assertives.

23) A kpaa akpaa, a rahụ n'ute (when well discussed, would sleep on the mat). When there is understanding through proper discussion or negotiation, conflict ought not to arise. This proverb instructs that those in conflict should reach a consensus through negotiation. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is assertives.

24) Isi ala anaghị atọ ebe a kpọrọ ya (head bend does not remain where it is bowed). Humility is not a sign of weakness. Accepting defeat is also not a sign of being a weakling. This proverb is used in conflict resolution whereby the individuals involved are educated that accepting defeat is not a sign of weakness but just to let peace reign. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is assertives.

25) Nwanne na nwanne bi n'udo, bụ e leta a ghara (there is peace between sibling, is forbearance). This proverb teaches the importance of forbearance among people. So long as offences keep coming, one needs a heart of forbearance to stay away from conflict. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is commissives.

26) Udo na ọganiihu bụ ụmụnne (peace and progress are siblings). This proverb explains the impact of peace in place of conflict. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is assertives.

27) Biri, ka m biri mere na ụwa na-aga nke ọma (live and let live is the reason why life is going forward). When everyone lives in peace, there is progress. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is expressives.

28) N’oge ọkọchị, ọkụkọ amabeghị onye ga-efo ya ọdụ n’udummiri (during dry season, the hen does not know who will remove her feather in the rainy season). For an effective flight of a hen during the rainy season, a portion of the feather ought to be removed. When humans are likened in this situation, it predicts the fact that those in conflict do not know who would save or help the other in the future time when uncertainty befalls the individual or group. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is assertives.

29) Mmadu ka aha ya bu Ọgụadijima (someone’s name is ‘fight is not good’). Fight, war or conflict is not an ideal way of life. This is a proverb used in counseling people in conflict for peace to be restored. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is expressives.

30) Onye gbuo nwanne ya, naanị ya ọ ga-ebi? (if one kills his brother, will he live alone?). Lonliness is the reward of him who kills his neighbour. This proverb is used in conflict resolution whereby those in conflicts are counseled on the effect of the situation. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is assertives.

31) Were ehie chụwa ewu ojii, tupu o rue abali mgbe ọchịchiri na ewu ojii ga-abụ otu (look for the black goat during the day before night comes when the black goat and night would look alike). Conflicts are better resolved earlier when the impact or effects have not cause colossal damage. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is directives.

32) Diochi anaghị ekwucha ihe ọ hụrụ n’elu nkụ. (palmwine tapper does not say everything he sees on the palm tree). A palmwine tapper sees several things when he climbs the palm tree in the bush. He sees both positive and negative things. He is bound not to utter all that he has seen for the sake of safety, sanity, etc. An individual should not take to bar all that happen around him for the sake of peace. The illocutionary act present in the proverb is expressives.

From the above examples (11-32), the proverbs are suggestive of the presence of conflict, of which the effect is meant to resolve the conflict and restore peace. These proverbs are used to settle dispute in Igbo. Many times, once a certain proverb is uttered, the individual whom it is meant for, has taken note. Furthermore, the proverbs used in conflict resolution are for warning, explanation, etc. The most prevalent illocutionary acts in the proverbs for conflict resolution are assertives, directives and commissives.

On the part of perlocutionary acts, which are actually the resultant effects of the utterances of the speaker which could be inspiring, persuading, consoling, promising, encouraging, etc. Hence, it could be seen as the intended or unintended consequences of the speaker's utterance. In example (31), it could be seen as an act of persuading someone to do something or encouraging an individual. This is a perlocutionary act. Examples (25, 26, 27, etc) could be seen as being inspiring as the perlocutionary act. Perlocutionary act of promise could be seen in example (16). In example (24), it could be seen as a consolative perlocutionary act, etc.

#### **4. Summary and Conclusion**

In summary, it could be seen that proverbs play vital role in Igbo, beyond mere discussion, counsel, education; it also plays role in security alert and conflict resolution in Igbo. Proverbs are words of deep understanding whose meaning have several expressive roles. In Igbo, each situation has proverbs best suitable for it which includes; death, children, wealth, animals, etc. through this research, we focus on the proverbs that play role in security alert and also conflict resolution. Observation was made as certain proverbs give notice at the presence of insecurity, '*Agwọ nọ n'akiriika*', '*Osọ ndu agwụ ike*', '*Okukọ na-akpa nri si umu ya, anya uhie akọla ha*', etc.

At the uttering of such proverbs in Igbo land, it signals insecurity to the individuals, of which proper security consciousness should be imbibed. On the other hand, proverbs help in resolving conflicts in Igbo. For instance, ‘*Ka anyị kwọọ mmiri mgbe ọ ka dị n’obe ukwu tupu o rue n’ukwu*’, ‘*N’oge ọkọchi, ọkụkọ amabeghi onye ga-efo ya ọdu n’udummiri*’, etc are proverbs suggesting peace where there is conflict. Furthermore, the use of proverbs amongst non-native speakers of the language hence creates insecurity to the hearers who may feel the utterances are made against them. Even though the non speakers might have basic knowledge of the language, but as proverbs are deeper part of a language which is not learnt on a peripheral, poses threat of insecurity to the hearers who do not belong to the language class. The discussion was based on Searle’s (1969) categorization of illocutionary act which are into five classes: Assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives

Conclusively, it is not gainsay that proverbs are merely ordinary words for normal use, but of diverse importance especially in Igbo land. Nevertheless, Igbo language is not the only language that makes use of proverb in conflict resolution or for security awareness. This research has thrown light on this dimension of the importance of proverbs in Igbo land. Proverbs play vital role in conflict resolution and security alert in Igbo.

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